

Vain-glory and *Amour Propre*: Hobbes and Rousseau on Political Pride.

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What motivates individuals to pursue violence? Is it merely self-interest? What motivates a suicide bomber, for example, to die and kill for a cause? Obviously, it is not merely life, or health or wealth. It is not self-interest understood in the usual way. This self-sacrifice needs to be explained.

Political pride in one's nation, one's religion, one's cause is a key element in political conflict. While such pride may have a defensible form, it can also fuel fanaticism, and make peace settlements fragile or elusive.

All of this has the status of something pretty close to common sense. Yet the phenomenon of political pride is poorly understood. Partly for methodological reasons, it remains beneath the radar of many political scientists. Some of the most important reflections on political pride can be found in the work of Hobbes and Rousseau.

Hobbes, working in the crucible of the English civil war, provides a compelling critique of what he calls vain-glory in politics. He sees pride as a dangerous passion, the source of the “bitterest wars.”<sup>1</sup> Vain-glorious, eloquent leaders often foster the passions in their followers that feed political strife. He recommends that the sovereign suppress the worst aspects of pride through

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, On the Citizen, trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Chapter 1, p. 26. Subsequent references to this edition of *De Cive* will be embodied in brackets within the essay.

fear. Leviathan is King over the “children of pride.”<sup>2</sup> Rousseau agrees with Hobbes that when misdirected, human self-love causes all kinds of misery. But the authors disagree about which aspects of pride are most problematic. Rousseau also diverges from Hobbes in his argument that the self-love that is the source of pride (which he calls *amour propre*) is not simply natural. In the Discourse on Inequality, Rousseau contends that *amour propre* is a factitious passion, which is born in society. Even if it has a natural component, as he concedes in Emile, it is inflated and swollen by other passions that do not come from nature.

This difference has repercussions: much of the pathology of pride, which Hobbes thinks is a natural, permanent feature of humanity in need of stifling, Rousseau sees as unnatural and therefore unnecessary. Where Hobbes sees a rigid and recalcitrant natural datum,<sup>3</sup> Rousseau sees an unfortunate but

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<sup>2</sup> Leviathan, C.B. Macpherson, ed. (London: Penguin, 1968), Chapter 28, p. 362. References to Leviathan will also be embodied in the text and will be keyed to this edition. Note, too, that Hobbes begins this important passage with the assertion that “Hitherto I have set forth the nature of man, (whose Pride and other Passions have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government).” On this latter point, cf. De Cive, Chapters 1 and 5; Leviathan, Chapter 17.

<sup>3</sup> Hobbes’s assumption that vain-glory is natural is shown by his decision to analyze it in sections of his works devoted to man in the state of nature and outside of civil society. It is also illustrated, for example, in his reference to the “natural tendency of men to exasperate each other, the source of which is the passions and especially an empty self-esteem.” De Cive, Chapter 1, (p. 29). Cf. Richard Tuck’s fascinating discussion of Hobbes’s unusual separation of Civil Philosophy (about artificial bodies) from Ethics (“a subdivision of the general science of natural bodies”) in his “Hobbes’s Moral Philosophy,” in Tom Sorell, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

alterable development that needs to be refocused and redeployed. It stands to reason that since he thinks *amour propre* is unnatural, he sees fewer intractable limits on how it can be remolded. At any rate, Rousseau proposes that *amour propre* be re-channeled into communal pride in the city.

There is another important difference between Hobbes and Rousseau. Since Rousseau seeks to foster a politics based on noble moral intentions, producing virtuous citizens, he thinks such a channeling of *amour propre* into communal pride in the city is not only possible but desirable. Instead of a sovereign who staunches pride with fear; Rousseau actually incorporates *amour propre* into the psyche of a collective sovereign. Whereas Hobbes constructs a Leviathan to terrify and intimidate the children of pride, Rousseau seeks to form the devoted citizens of a direct democracy whose collective pride will rule their more selfish and mercenary desires.

#### Hobbes's interpretation of Vain-glory

“All the heart's joy and pleasure lies in being able to compare oneself favourably with others and form a high opinion of oneself.” So Hobbes writes, with unflinching frankness, in *De Cive*. (Chapter 1, Section 5., p. 26).<sup>4</sup> In this section of the essay, we will examine Hobbes's analysis of the passion of vain-glory. Subsequently, we will undertake a close reading of his

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<sup>4</sup> Some interpreters have noted that glory plays a more prominent role in Hobbes's early writings such as *De Cive* than in his later ones, including *Leviathan*. For different interpretations of this, see Gabriella Slomp, *Thomas Hobbes and the Political Philosophy of Glory*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000) and Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1936), pp. 13-15. For a review of Slomp and other recent books about Hobbes, see Samantha Frost, “Hobbes Out of Bounds” in *Political Theory*, Vol. 32 No. 2, April 2004, pp. 257-273.

treatment of vain-glory in chapters 11 and 12 of Leviathan. We will suggest that in these chapters Hobbes reveals the workings of pride and ambition in leaders and tries to instill skepticism of would-be usurpers in his readers. In addition to advocating the suppression of pride by fear, Hobbes undertakes the strategy of exposing the (often over-looked) working of vain-glory in politics.

“The passion whose violence, or continuance maketh Madnesse, is either great *vaine-Glory*; which is commonly called *Pride*, and *self-conceit*; or great Dejection of mind.” So Hobbes declares in chapter 8 of Leviathan. ( p. 140). But what sort of passion is vain-glory? What are its political effects?

Vain-glory involves glorying in that it is a feeling of joy or exultation arising from the imagination of one’s power and ability. Hobbes suggests that glorying in one’s own power can have an admirable or at least an acceptable form: it can be founded on the knowledge of one’s proven actions in the past. This is confidence. But vain-glory results if this pleasurable feeling of one’s power is ill-founded. Hobbes identifies two distinct types of vain-glory: one is glorying that is based on the flattery of others or on mere chance and the other is glorying “only supposed” by oneself .

Firstly, let us consider the kind of vain-glory that involves merely supposing abilities in oneself. In the Elements of Law, Hobbes tells us that it is common among readers of “romants.”<sup>5</sup> It is the vain-glory of day dreamers, and involves the pretending or supposing “abilities in ourselves that we know are not.” (Leviathan, Chapter 6, p. 125). This means it is not a complete self-deception: if we know these abilities “are not,” it is instead a willed and temporary evasion of reality, a suspension of our disbelief in these capacities. Vain-glorious dreamers of this kind “delight in supposing

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<sup>5</sup> Hobbes, Human Nature and the Corpore Politico, J.C.A. Gaskin, ed., (Oxford University Press, 1994), 9.

themselves gallant men.” (Leviathan, Chapter 11, p. 163). They dream of their self-sufficiency but tend to avoid action; the problems and difficulties that inevitably arise in any serious undertaking would reveal their insufficiency and Hobbes says they try to avoid having this discovered. (For one thing, this revelation would undercut the pleasure of their reveries).

The other sort of vain-glorious men are also contrasted with the confident. They “estimate their sufficiency by the flattery of other men, or by the fortune of some precedent action” rather than on a firm confidence based on accurate self-knowledge. But unlike the dreamers, these vain-glorious men tend to embrace action – at least initially. Hobbes says they are prone to “rash engaging.” They take on a task but withdraw from it at the first sign of real danger or hardship: “not seeing the way of safety, they will rather hazard their honour, which may be salved with an excuse; than their lives, for which no salve is sufficient.” (p. 72 ).

Here self-deception precedes the revelation of fraudulence. The rash engagers begin with an ill-founded judgment of themselves which encourages them to take action –this initiative impresses themselves and others and unlike the dreamers they seem to mistakenly believe in their capabilities at the outset— but once they are in danger and their inadequacy or cowardice is made clear to them, they try to shield this knowledge from others. They emerge as poseurs and pretenders.

But this does not mean that they cause little harm --- on the contrary after explaining the character of the vain-glorious “prone to rash engaging,” Hobbes uses the rest of the chapter as a warning to those who submit themselves to the eloquent, vain-glorious men. He gradually turns from the source of men’s confidence in themselves to the source of their confidence in others, that is, from the vain-glorious men who have ill-founded confidence in themselves to the followers who have an ill-founded confidence in others.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 6 of Leviathan, Hobbes notes that in the case of both types of vain-glory, the name “Vaine-glory” is “properly given; because a well-

## Eloquent Speakers and their Followers

His critique of eloquence is the key to this account. For eloquence feeds the ambitions of would-be political leaders and seduces credulous followers. How does eloquence feed the ambition of those who seek to lead? Hobbes contends that men who “have a strong opinion of their wisdom in matter of government” tend to be ambitious because they seek public office to display this alleged wisdom and to be honored for it. “And therefore,” Hobbes deduces, “eloquent speakers are enclined to Ambition, for eloquence seemeth wisdom both to themselves and others.” (Leviathan, Chapter 11, p. 164).

Eloquence is dangerous because it can mislead and deceive both the eloquent speakers themselves and their listeners. Hobbes contends that eloquence is “seeming wisdom” or “seeming prudence.” (Leviathan, p. 164) In De Cive, he notes that the goal of eloquence is “not the truth (except by

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grounded Confidence begetteth Attempt; whereas the supposing of power does not, and is therefore rightly called Vaine.” (p. 125). This might seem to be at odds with our reading of the impact of the actions of vain-glorious leaders but consider the following arguments. An earlier version of the contrast between the two types of glorying can be found in the Elements of Law. There Hobbes calls the glorying merely supposed by oneself “vain-glory,” but he calls glorying based on the flattery of others “false glory.” (Chapter 9). My conjecture would be that he makes the change in the name of the glorying that is based on the flattery of others for strategic reasons. Calling it vain-glory enables him to discredit it as vain, both in the sense of being arrogant and in the sense of being ineffectual. Concomitantly, by stating that this type of vain-glory does not lead to attempt, he draws attention to the fact that orators often get others to do the risky work for them; some generals die in bed because they leave the physical risk, the physical attempt to others.

accident) but victory.”(p. 123).<sup>7</sup> Some speakers use their eloquence not to expound true principles but to stimulate the passions of those who listen. Thus they communicate the excitement of their minds to the “the minds of others.” Hobbes goes so far as to say that through this eloquence, speakers “render their hearers insane (who were merely stupid before).”(p. 140).

What allows this to happen? How can people allow themselves to become dupes of eloquent leaders? For information about this we need to examine chapters 11 and 12 of Leviathan. In these chapters, Hobbes entwines his critique of the eloquence of vain-glorious leaders with a very penetrating exposé of the dubious practices of religious leaders. This exposé is explicitly aimed at purveyors of the ancient Greek and Roman religions (and of Islam as well) but Protestant and Catholic leaders also come in for criticism, and the entire account encourages skepticism of all religious declaration in any reader. This account will repay our careful exegesis.

Hobbes identifies fear and ignorance as the root causes of men’s subjection to ambitious, private men. Fear and ignorance are the holds these men grab onto in order to better manipulate their followers. (See Chapter 12, p. 177). He begins with ignorance and distinguishes three types of ignorance that ground men’s willingness to put their faith in leaders. First, “ignorance of the marks of wisdom and kindness” allow some men to acquire the trust of others: “eloquence with flattery disposeth men to confide in them that have it; because the former is seeming Wisdom, the later seeming Kindness. Adde to them Military reputation, and it disposeth men to adhere, and subject themselves to them that have them. The former two having given them caution against danger from him; the later gives them caution against danger from others.” (Leviathan, p. 164). Hobbes’s argument is not so much that people get the leaders they deserve, rather he indicates why he thinks they get the leaders they have (even if they deserve better). He contends the people

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<sup>7</sup> But see also his refinement of this position later in the same text on page 139.



seek to serve their interest in attaching themselves to leaders; they seek wise, kind leaders who defend them but because they lack the ability to judge these qualities accurately, they are unable to judge the leaders' motivation accurately.

Secondly, because most men lack science, which is to say, because they are ignorant of natural causes, they have to depend on the opinions and authority of other men. Thirdly, men are ignorant of the meaning of words. Hobbes calls this form of ignorance lack of "understanding." Because of it, men endorse both the errors and absurdity of "them they trust."<sup>8</sup> (p. 165). One can surmise that these second and third forms of ignorance are amenable to different remedies. Study builds knowledge of natural causes, while practice in using words accurately (of the kind afforded by Hobbes's works) improves understanding. Their consequences are also different: ignorance of natural causes produces credulity whereas lack of understanding sets the stage for misunderstanding and intolerance. For example, because of the ignorance of the precise meaning of words, men term "heresy" what is simply a private opinion that they "mislike." (p. 165).

Hobbes drafts his argument in this section much as a musician composes a piece of music. Having begun with the theme of ignorance, he shows its several variations and reveals how each contributes differently to the way that men put their confidence in others. This movement of thought reaches a kind of crescendo with his discussion of how ignorance of the meaning of words prevents men from understanding what he sees as a politically crucial distinction between the unified action of a group of men and the separate actions of a number of individuals:

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding error and absurdity, compare Chapter 5 of Leviathan. See also Michael Oakeshott's seminal introduction to Leviathan, reprinted in his Hobbes on Civil Association (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

From the same it also proceedeth, that men cannot distinguish, without study and great understanding, between one action of many men, and many actions of one multitude; as for example, between the one action of all the Senators of Rome in killing Catiline, and the many actions of a number of senators in killing Caesar; and therefore are disposed to take for the action of the people, that which is a multitude of actions done by a multitude of men, led perhaps by the persuasion of one. (p. 165).

The senators of Rome decided together to condemn Catiline, the usurper who was killed in battle after losing the consular election to Cicero, but through the influence of one speaker, presumably Brutus, a series of actions led to the killing of Caesar.<sup>9</sup> The action of the senators is a single act because it is based on the decision of a body that has one will; it is contrasted with the separate actions of particular individuals which lead to the death of Caesar.

A passage from Ch. 6 of De Cive sheds light on this contrast. There Hobbes contrasts a disunited multitude and a united body that is capable of will and action. He suggests that a multitude of men are not, of themselves, “a *single entity*, but a number of men, each of whom has his own will and his own judgment about every proposal.” (p. 75, the emphasis is Hobbes’s). Whatever is done by a multitude (*Multitudo*) of this sort “must be understood as being done by each of those” who make it up. (p. 76). In Hobbes’s view, one must not attribute any single, unified act (*una actio*) to this kind of multitude. However, if members of such a multitude decide that the will of a counsel or an individual can represent their wills, they become a single entity which is “endowed with a will and can therefore perform voluntary actions.”

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<sup>9</sup> See Robert Tuck, ed. Leviathan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. lxx. Hobbes also discusses Catiline in De Cive, Chapter 12. Cf. “Caesar” in Plutarch’s Lives. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/caesar.html> Accessed May 21, 2005

(pp. 76-77). The multitude then wills through the counsel or individual. Rhetoricians such as Brutus may rally individuals by their claims to act in the name of the people but Hobbes contends that only a unified body to whom the people has conferred the power of willing (such as the Roman senate) can act on the people's behalf. It can do so because it can act and will as one. A disunited multitude, on the other hand, is a motley series of wills; in it, Hobbes maintains, the "state of nature persists." (p. 76)

Hobbes's overall strategy in this section is clearly to instill skepticism toward eloquent, ambitious men. If it requires "study and great understanding" to unveil the motives of persuasive, private men, Hobbes provides some of the tools needed for this task. "No one can make you feel inferior without your permission," Eleanor Roosevelt is alleged to have said. Divisive leaders cannot get credit with the people without the people allowing it. The people's vulnerabilities are like grooves or tracks on which the trains of usurpers to come into town. Hobbes points to and describes the grooves; he catalogues<sup>10</sup> the types of ignorance that create this receptivity to the influence of eloquent men.

#### Fear: The Seed Nourished by the Authors of Religion

Hobbes's focus then moves from men's ignorance-based vulnerabilities to their fear-based vulnerabilities. Fear is apt to ground religious feeling and to allow the subjection of the people to religious leaders. "Feare of things invisible is the natural seed" of religion, a seed to which some individuals add opinions "of their own invention" in order to better control and rule others. (p. 168). The heart of the seed of religion is our

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<sup>10</sup> Ignorance of the principles of right and wrong, he adds in the next pages, leads men to rely on the appeal to custom. Ignorance of the causes of peace allows men to attach themselves to private men who foment unrest. Thus, for example, private men whip up the people's anger against the paying of taxes.

human anxiety for the future, our “perpetuall solicitude for times to come.” (p. 169).<sup>11</sup> This fear comes in part from the ignorance of natural causes which leaves men guessing as to what can help and harm them. And this fear “always accompanying mankind in the ignorance of causes, as it were in the dark, must needs have for object something.”(pp. 169-70). The people’s fear becomes focused on invisible agents or gods.

Hobbes illustrates how the “authors of the Religion of the Gentiles” cultivated the seed of religion in their peoples. These men encouraged others to believe in ghosts, to see gods as the intermediate causes of events, to worship idols in ceremonies, and to regard random circumstances as predictive of future events. They encourage these beliefs and practices to foster peacefulness and docility amongst the people, and Hobbes likely has some sympathy for this goal. But their methods for doing so are to invent and impose upon the people a staggering amount of superstition.<sup>12</sup> After listing the wild variety of events interpreted as predictors of future occurrences by the authors of Greek and Roman religions, Hobbes comments as follows: “So easy are men to be drawn to believe any thing, from such men as have gotten credit with them; and can with gentleness and dexterity, take hold of their fear and ignorance.” (p. 177).

Vain-glory, we suggest, is both the starting point and the base of the movement of thought in these chapters, a movement of thought Hobbes uses to discredit unwise and dangerous leaders. Eloquent men are often dangerous

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<sup>11</sup> This point has been investigated by Lorelea Michaelis in her paper, “The Political Philosophy of Uncertainty: Hobbes’ Modern Prometheus,” presented at the American Political Science Association Conference, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Much of Hobbes’s critique of “heathen” religions might also be applied to the Christian religion. To give just one example, his critique of prayer could apply to Christianity. (p. 174). It would also be worthwhile to compare his descriptions of the leaders of the Gentiles with his treatments of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus in Book 3 of Leviathan.

men and they prey on the ignorance and fear of the people. (Whereas some interpreters identify economic deprivation as the root cause of terrorism, Hobbes would stress instead the importance of fear and ignorance amongst the recruited.<sup>13</sup>) The most obvious aspect of Hobbes's solution to the problem of political pride is his advocacy of an absolute and unlimited sovereign who will suppress vain-glory by the use of fear.<sup>14</sup> But, as we have argued, he also seeks to undermine the grasp of leaders on people's minds by exposing their motives and methods.

In Leviathan, Hobbes treats vain-glory as a political phenomenon of those who (for better or worse) are sometimes now called "elites."<sup>15</sup> Hobbes repeatedly discusses the dangers to the Commonwealth of men who simply have too much time on their hands. (Leviathan, Chapter 17, De Cive, Chapter 12). But it is worth remembering that much of what Hobbes criticizes as unacceptable agitation, most modern democrats would see as politics as usual. The dissenting student of Hobbes recalls that he would tolerate the sovereign's destruction of citizens who use forceful eloquence to defend a point of view that might be seen as threatening to the Commonwealth. Obviously there is a very wide range of actors who use rhetoric, from warlords to terrorist cell leaders to gangsta rappers to peace activists to presidential candidates (not to mention university professors!). Some of these actors may be unprincipled, others may defend unreasonable or wrong-headed

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<sup>13</sup> For a controversial but thought-provoking look at the causes of contemporary terrorism, see Walter Laqueur, "The Terrorism to Come," Policy Review, August and September, 2004, no. 126. Accessed Sunday, August 15, 2004 <http://www.policyreview.org/aug04/laqueur.html>

<sup>14</sup> He may also anticipate that the sovereign will sublimate or channel the pride of some subjects through the use of titles, such as Duke, Count and Marquis, which "distinguish the precedence, place and order of subjects in the Commonwealth," although they are not to signify the holding of a command or office. (Leviathan, Chapter 10, p. 158ff.)

<sup>15</sup> His "children of pride" reference is arguably an exception.

principles. But at least some actors, some of the time, use rhetoric to defend legitimate principles. Nelson Mandela's speeches aimed at the transformation of the South African regime in the name of racial equality deserve mention here. Catherine MacKinnon and other feminists have used rhetorical techniques in the service of the ideal of the liberation of women. These examples raise a question about the use of rhetoric (even if it is also partly motivated by vain-glory) in defense of important principles (such as racial equality or the liberation of women). In one passage of *De Cive*, Hobbes concedes that eloquence can be used in defense of true principles, but he defines these principles so narrowly in terms of self-preservation that basic demands for equal dignity and respect could be excluded. (Chapter 12, p. 139)

This is not to say that there is nothing to be learned from his analysis. On the contrary, I know of no other major political philosopher (with the possible exception of Thucydides, his teacher) who thought through with such carefulness the dynamic that underlies the appeal of eloquent leaders today.

#### Rousseau's View of *Amour Propre* in Politics

Having examined Hobbes's analysis of vain-glory, his diagnosis of its effect on politics and his response to this, we turn to Rousseau's very different views of these questions. For although Rousseau agrees with Hobbes that pride is crucially important in politics, he has a very different analysis of its character, a different diagnosis of its detrimental effects, and he offers very different political prescriptions (which follow in part from the former differences).

Our examination of Rousseau's view of pride in politics will begin with his discussions of *amour propre* in the Discourse on Inequality and Emile. Subsequently, we will focus on the ideas about the use of *amour propre* in politics that he expresses in his often neglected treatise, the Discourse on Political Economy, ideas that shed some light on the political commitments he espouses in his more famous work, the Social Contract.

Rousseau's first discussion of *amour propre* in the Discourse on Inequality occurs in the context of a critique of Hobbes's view of human nature. He asserts that Hobbes wrongly asserted that men are by nature wicked. This is because Hobbes "improperly included in Savage man's care for his self-preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the product of Society and have made Laws necessary."<sup>16</sup> Among these passions is *amour propre*. In the Discourse on Inequality, Rousseau defines *amour propre* as a self-conscious form of self-love that is the source of vanity, ambition, malice and jealousy. There he distinguishes it sharply from *amour de soi*, a more primitive, natural form of self-love: "*Amour propre* [vanity] and *Amour de soi-meme* [self-love], two very different passions in their nature and their effects, should not be confused. Self-love is a natural sentiment which inclines every animal to attend to its self-preservation and which, guided in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. *Amour propre* is only a relative sentiment, factitious and born in society, which inclines every individual, to set greater store by himself than by anyone else, inspires men with all the evils they do one another, and is the genuine source of honour."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Discourses and Other Political Writings, Victor Gourevitch, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 151. Subsequent page references to this edition will be embodied parenthetically within the text. French references will be keyed to the Pléiade edition: Oeuvres complètes, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1964). I will provide volume and page number; e.g., the above passage is to be found at OC 3:153.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 218, Footnote XV. The interpositions in brackets are Gourevitch's and not my own. OC 3:219.

The most extensive considerations of Rousseau's idea of *amour propre* in the secondary literature are to be found in Allan Bloom's Love and Friendship, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) and N.J. H. Dent's Rousseau,

Rousseau explains that man in the first state of nature harbours no *amour propre* because he does not have the degree of enlightenment required to compare himself to others. He writes decisively that it is impossible that *amour propre*, a sentiment which has, “its source in comparisons he is not capable of making could spring up in his soul.” *Amour propre* requires the “ability to form an opinion of some offense received.” (p. 218; OC 3:219). He then suggests that the attribution of the independence of natural causation to other humans is constitutive of this “opinion of some offense received.” Therefore the attribution of free will to other men also contributes to the development of *amour propre*.<sup>18</sup>

*Amour propre* develops gradually in man along with the progress of enlightenment, and the emergence of settled communities, private property and the division of labour. As men begin to depend more upon one another, and as their interests begin to conflict,<sup>19</sup> they begin to compete with one another for respect, admiration and honour. They become increasingly obsessed with their reputations. They frequently view themselves from the point of view of other people. It is, Rousseau writes, “to this ardor to be talked about, to this frenzy to achieve distinction which almost always keeps us outside ourselves, that we owe what is best and worst among men, our virtues

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(Oxford, Blackwell, 1989). I would also like to thank Tyler Wood for his discussion of Rousseau’s historicization of *amour propre*.

<sup>18</sup> I have made the case for this interpretation in much more detail in my doctoral dissertation, The Free Animal: Free Will and Perfectibility in Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality. I have drawn on a few sentences from the dissertation in the above paragraph. Also, note that I adopt the sexist language of Hobbes and Rousseau consciously, so as to be able to keep the question of their repression of female existence open to investigation. In this case, gender-neutrality would muddy the waters.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to Beaumont, OC 4: 936-7, Cf. the Preface to “Narcissus”, in Gourevitch, The Discourses and Other Early Political writings, p. 101.



and our vices, our Sciences and our errors, our Conquerors and our Philosophers, that is to say, a multitude of bad things for a small number of good things.”(p. 184; OC 3:189;)<sup>20</sup> Characteristically, here Rousseau combines a consideration of the personal effects of *amour propre* on individuals with judgments of its effects on society and political life. “Those who want to treat politics and morality separately,” he writes in Emile, “will never understand either of the two.”<sup>21</sup> Hobbes appears willing to tolerate individual psychological suffering caused by the exercise of vain-glory in civil society --in business or personal life, for example-- as long as it does not cause open political conflict or rebellion. Rousseau is attentive to the direct political implications of *amour propre*; he sees clearly that by encouraging hostility and indifference to others it perpetuates inequality. But he also has a keen sense of the significance of the psychological harm it causes individuals (as it contributes to hypocrisy, delusion, and unhappiness), and he believes that these forms of psychological harm have political effects; they can result in apathy and ineptitude for democratic self-government.

The teaching about *amour propre* in Emile (1762), is significantly different from that of the Discourse on Inequality (1756). In Emile, Rousseau no longer starts from two separate definitions of self-love, one natural and the other unnatural and destructive. Instead he begins from one passion: “the sole passion natural to man,” he writes, “is *amour de soi* or *amour propre* taken in the extended sense.” (p. 92; OC 4:322). Interpreters sometimes refer to this as the recuperation of *amour propre* in Emile. In effect, Rousseau replaces the earlier duality between *amour de soi* and *amour propre* with a duality between healthy *amour propre* and unhealthy *amour*

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Clifford Orwin, “Rousseau’s Ethics” in Norma Thompson, ed. Instilling Ethics, (Lanham, Md. Rowman and Littlefield, 2000)

<sup>21</sup> Rousseau, Emile, or On Education, Allan Bloom, trans. (Chicago: Basic Books, 1979), p. 235. Subsequent references in the text will refer to this edition.

*propre*.<sup>22</sup> Emile also contains a second, related change from Rousseau's presentation of *amour propre* in the Discourse. Here he concedes there may be a natural element to *amour propre* in the extended sense. In a key passage, he explicates his position using the metaphor of a river. The context is a consideration of the naturalness of our passions. Rousseau writes that "their source is natural, it is true. But countless alien streams have swollen it. It is a great river which constantly grows and in which one could hardly find a few drops of its first waters. Our natural passions are very limited. They are the instruments of our freedom, they tend to preserve us. All those which subject us and destroy us come from elsewhere. Nature does not give them to us. We appropriate them to the detriment of nature." (p. 212; OC 4: 491; cf. OC 4: 936ff.).

But how can man develop unnatural passions? In Rousseau's subsequent presentation, man's dysfunction emerges as a form of self-consciousness brought on in response to his consciousness of the intentions of others who freely wish to hurt us or help us.<sup>23</sup> As we become aware of the full significance of the freedom of the wills of others, we begin to desire forms of recognition and love from them that they are hardly able to provide. And these others often have imperious or placating wills of their own which exacerbate the dysfunction. As a result, we develop irascible wills or servile wills, we

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<sup>22</sup> Joshua Cohen makes the useful move of adopting the term "healthy *amour propre*" to distinguish it from the problematic, destructive kind in his "The Natural Goodness of Humanity," in Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls, Andrews Reath, et. al eds. (Cambridge University Press, 1997)

<sup>23</sup> Again, I have made the case for this in detail elsewhere. In particular, I have argued that Rousseau needs the concept of the consciousness of free will, the consciousness of our independence of nature, to ground his critique of the unnaturalness of men.

become masters and slaves, unable to secure freedom and independence. We leave the path of nature.

In Emile, Rousseau tries to describe the education of a free and independent individual who is to live according to nature insofar as this is possible in the context of modern European society. Emile's education involves the training of his *amour propre*. His reason is to be developed to guide it. And his compassion will shape and moderate it. Thus, for example, Emile is to engage in charitable actions and Rousseau contemplates the results of his benevolence as follows: "Let us extend *amour propre* to other beings. We shall transform it into a virtue, and there is no man's heart in which this virtue does not have its root." (p. 252; OC 4: 547).

Just as Rousseau recommends the shaping and training of Emile's *amour propre*, he recommends the use of *amour propre* in politics. The Discourse On Political Economy contains his most explicit discussion of how he thinks *amour propre* can be channeled in political life. There he focuses on the task of shaping citizens' characters so that they are devoted to the community. He seeks to form citizens who love the laws they will obey: "in order to do what one ought, it suffices to think that one ought to do it."<sup>24</sup> One of the key tasks for statesmen is to attach the people to the common good by making them love their country, "*la patrie*." Patriotism, he contends, "combines the force of *amour propre* with all the beauty of virtue." (p. 16; OC 3: 255)

The formation of citizens devoted to the State requires the education of their passions. Rousseau explains this process in a particularly revealing passage:

While men cannot be taught not to love anything, it is not impossible to teach them to love one object rather than another, and to

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<sup>24</sup> OC 3: 252; Rousseau, Discourse on Political Economy in The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings, Victor Gourevitch trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 13. Subsequent page numbers refer to this English edition.

love what is genuinely fine rather than what is malformed. If, for example, they are taught from sufficiently early on never to look upon their individual [self] except in its relations with the body of the state, and to perceive their own existence as, so to speak, only a part of its existence, they will at last succeed in somehow identifying with this larger whole, to feel themselves members of the fatherland, to love it with that exquisite sentiment which any isolated man has only for himself, to raise their soul perpetually to this great object, and thus to transform into a sublime virtue the dangerous disposition that gives rise to all our vices.

(p. 20; OC 3: 259-260).

Here Rousseau describes the transfer of individual self-love or *amour propre* to the love of one's country. Modern peoples, he concedes, will have strong objections to such a transfer, but he responds that these objections turn precisely on their attachment to an overly narrow version of self-love: "It is too late to change our natural inclinations once they are set in their course, and habit has joined *amour propre*; it is too late to draw us out of ourselves once the *human self*, concentrated within our hearts, has there become actively engaged in the contemptible concerns that do away with all virtue and make up the life of petty souls. How could the love of fatherland arise in the midst of so many other passions that stifle it? And what is left for fellow citizens of a heart already divided between greed, a mistress and vanity?" (pp. 20-21; OC 3:260).

These passages shed considerable light on Rousseau's political project in the Social Contract. There he contends, for example, that in accepting the social contract each gives "himself to all." (Gourevitch, p. 50; OC 3: 361). This requirement in fact presupposes the transformation of individualist *amour propre* to a collective *amour propre*, described in the Political Economy. So, too, the aspiration toward the general good he expects in his citizens as they will the general will, is rooted in his reasoning in the Political Economy that "we readily want what the people we love want." (OC 3:254).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The French is revealing: "*nous voulons volontiers ce que veulent les gens que nous aimons.*"

Rousseau seeks to use *amour propre* to build the psychological disposition he thinks is needed by a sovereign people capable of democratic self-rule.

In conclusion, although Hobbes and Rousseau agree broadly on the importance of pride in politics, they disagree about its naturalness. And while both stress its destructive aspects, they have different opinions about which are the most problematic. They also have very different solutions or responses to the problems of pride in politics.

Perhaps a final reflection on terminology is in order. After all, the fact that the thinkers use different terms to describe pride is an important clue to character of their divergent views about it. One thing strikes me in particular: Rousseau's *amour propre* is not simply a form of glorying, not simply a form of passion, but a form of love. Rousseau inherited the term *amour propre* from earlier French writers but it is worth reflecting on the consequences of referring to pride as a type of love. As a form of love, perhaps *amour propre* offers a different set of possibilities than the passion of pride. Rousseau tells us the lover can be both sublime and odious; he stresses that the lover often strays very far from the path of nature. Whereas Hobbes sometimes treats vain-glory as a kind of masturbation, Rousseau's term *amour propre* invites reflection about the plasticity of political pride, and about its beauty. But Hobbes seems to know more about the terrible pain it can cause.

## Endnotes